

Documents on Diplomacy: Resources

Oh, What a Difference a Second World War Can Make!

Background Information on Bretton Woods and the UN Conference

I

Prelude to International Meetings

- a. The steps the United States took to gain support for an international organization started well in advance of meetings; a very different approach from that taken after World War I for the League of Nations.
- b. Secretary of State Cordell Hull formed an Advisory Committee on Postwar Foreign Policy early in 1942. Eventually the committee included key members of both parties in the Senate.
- c. Governors met in September, 1943 to pledge their support for an international organization.
- d. The House of Representatives passed the Fulbright Resolution (360–29) in June, 1943.
- e. The Senate approved a similar resolution, votes (85–5) in November, 1943.

II

The **United Nations Monetary and Financial Conference** or the **Bretton Woods Conference** was held in July 1944. This gathering addressed *economic* issues related to peace and involved over 1,000 specialists from 44 countries.

- a. Agreed to create an international loan fund of \$8.8 billion to stabilize national currencies and assist in payments across international boundaries. This was the beginning of the International Monetary Fund (IMF).
- b. Created a World Bank beginning with \$9.1 billion to assist in reconstruction and economic development for needy countries.
- c. Bretton Woods was (and still is) an upscale resort in New Hampshire. The owners were promised \$18 per person for the 19-day conference and were paid \$300,000 for the loss of additional business.

III

Planning for *political* issues of the future occurred from August 21–October 7, 1944 at the Dumbarton Oaks Conference. Representatives from the Big Four—United States, Great Britain, Russia, and China—met to draft a tentative charter for the United Nations. Dumbarton Oaks was a large colonial residence in Washington, D.C. owned by Harvard University.

IV

The United Nations Conference

- a. Held in San Francisco beginning on April 25, 1945.
- b. Attended initially by representatives from 46 countries. The number later reached 50.
- c. Secretary of State Cordell Hull had resigned due to bad health and the head of the U.S. delegation to the conference was the new Secretary, Edward R. Stettinius, Jr. Stettinius was a businessman, inexperienced in foreign affairs.
- d. President Roosevelt made sure that the Dumbarton Oaks plan was published and available to all, avoiding the secrecy associated with the League of Nations.
- e. Also, this proposal was NOT hampered by being attached to a peace treaty, which had made the League of Nations all the more difficult to accept.
- f. President Roosevelt died unexpectedly on April 12, 1945. The new president, Harry S Truman, announced that the conference would not be delayed.
- g. Flags at the conference flew at half-mast in honor of FDR.
- h. The “Big Four” powers also met privately in Secretary of State Stettinius’ penthouse at the Fairmont Hotel, including British Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden, Soviet Foreign Commissar Vyacheslav Molotov, and Chinese Foreign Minister T. V. Soong. This group approved several amendments from the Dumbarton Oaks charter draft.

Problems and Debates

- a. The Soviet Union wanted to resolve the issue of dependent territories in the possession of the British, French, and Americans. The United States wanted to keep the islands in the Pacific gained from Japan. Compromise was reached with the creation of a Trusteeship Council, allowing the United States to keep its islands, but promising independence someday.
- b. The Soviet Union did not approve of independent regional defensive alliances, seeing them as a conflict of interest that would undermine the concept of the United Nations. *Article 51* was created to provide wiggle room for these organizations. NATO was one of the first alliances created under Article 51.

c. The Soviet Union wanted any of the big powers in the Security Council to veto any decision, even the right of smaller powers to request debate on issues. Behind the scenes, the United States appealed directly to Stalin. It was agreed to allow the smaller powers to retain the right to debate (otherwise, they would have been closed out in discussions of issues).

d. Part of the Charter refers to the creation of an international police force. This creation did not occur for years based on objections by the Soviet Union.

Formal Approval by the U.S. Senate

a. This was a nerve-racking time for the Truman Administration, remembering that at this point in the process of approving the League of Nations, the U.S. Senate had refused to join.

b. Formal debate began in July 1945. The Charter was approved on July 28, 1945, 89–2.

c. The United States was a member of the United Nations even while the war with Japan was still in progress.

(Adapted from Thomas A. Bailey,
A Diplomatic History of the American People)